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"1815."

R. CATON WOODVILLE.



BEFORE describing the Picture, and the graphic incident therein depicted, it may be of interest to our American friends to know something of Mr. Caton Woodville, whose military pictures have won for him a name, second to none, amongst the painters of such subjects. This in a large measure has no doubt been due to the absolute accuracy of locality, the utmost care and faithfulness in dress and detail, together with the extraordinary spirit of realism with which his pictures abound.

Mr. Richard Caton Woodville, though of British birth, is the son of Richard Caton Woodville, of Baltimore, Maryland, U.S.A., who was also a painter of some distinction, having exhibited several important pictures of a military character, both in the United States and in the English Royal Academy. It may be remembered, a picture by Mr. Caton Woodville, Senr., entitled "The Sailor's Wedding," was, some years ago, burned in the Museum at Philadelphia, and that he was also the painter

of the picture called, "News from the Seat of War," being an incident in connection with the Mexican War. Mr. Woodville's grandfather was also an American, and his great great grandfather was John Carroll, of Carrolltown, the last surviving signer of the Treaty of Independence.

The famous Miss Catons, of Baltimore, generally known here as the three "American Graces," were the great aunts of the present Mr. Caton Woodville, and led the fashion of marrying into the noble families of England.

According to the Peerage, they married as follows:—

Elizabeth, married the then Sir George William, afterwards the 7th Baron Stafford.

Marianne, married first, Robert Paterson (whose sister Elizabeth was first wife of Jerome Bonaparte, King of Westphalia, and Marshal of France), after which she married the second Marquis of Wellesley.

Louisa Catherine, the third daughter, married Sir Felton Bathurst Hervey, Bart., and on his decease, Francis Godolphin D'Arcy, 7th Duke of Leeds.



“1815.”



“1815.”

By R. CATON WOODVILLE, R.I.



ATERLOO forms a fitting climax to the Napoleonic drama. It was indeed a battle of giants. “Never have two such generals as the Duke of Wellington and the Emperor Napoleon encountered since the day when Scipio and Hannibal met at Zama,” and never in the world’s history has

more heroic bravery been displayed than by the English, French, and German troops engaged on the 18th June, 1815.

The battle has long been the theme of poets and historians—it would, indeed, be no exaggeration to say that it has excited more controversy and discussion than any other event of modern history; and, judging by the number of new books published bearing on the subject, the popular interest in it shows no signs of abatement. While the deeds of the contending armies have been worthily handed down in prose and verse, it seems astounding to think that, with the exception of a few representations of incidents in the battle—mostly of an unimportant character—there absolutely existed until the present

time no fitting pictorial record of this the most famous of our national victories. This omission on the part of English artists is all the more a subject of regret, when one reflects on the splendid manner in which the victories of the French have been presented to posterity by Meissonier and other of their leading painters. In fact, the indifference hitherto displayed almost amounts to a stigma on English patriotism; and it must be a matter of general congratulation that Mr. R. Caton Woodville has essayed to remove it, by producing a comprehensive picture of the battle worthy to rank with Meissonier's famous series of Napoleonic pictures, to which indeed it forms a fitting sequel.

Mr. Woodville's qualifications for the task are too well known to need more than brief mention. His picture of "Saving the Guns" at Maiwand, painted some years ago, and purchased by the Corporation of Liverpool, England, for their City Art Gallery, by its vigorous and masterly technique at once elevated him to the front rank of military artists—a position he has since easily retained. Though painting in a much broader style than Meissonier, he is, like that artist, noted for his unflinching and exact realism. In none of his pictures is the slightest historical inaccuracy permitted for the sake of gaining picturesqueness of effect at the expense of truth. His knowledge of the military costumes of the Waterloo period is perhaps

unequalled, while those who are acquainted with the ground will appreciate the fidelity with which the topography of the scene is reproduced.

Mr. Woodville's canvas takes in almost the whole extent of the battlefield—a flat, uninteresting Belgium plain, broken only by a few slight undulations, and dotted here and there with clumps of trees. One of the principal objects in the foreground is the little farmhouse of La Haye Sainte, originally forming the most advanced position of the English centre, and which the French carried early in the day. It was held for Wellington by a corps of the German Legion who died almost to a man in its defence, and traces

of the desperate conflict are everywhere visible about the blazing buildings. Near the farmhouse is the junction of three roads, the broad way in the centre is the Road leading to St. Jean, and the ones on your left and right are to Waterloo and Papelotte. The trees stretching along the horizon behind the English lines are part of the Forest of Soignes, which Wellington declared he could have held against any force the French might bring against him, even had he been compelled to retreat from Waterloo. A dome-like building rising to the left of the wood is the citadel of the village of Waterloo, and a small white house hard by, also visible, formed the British hospital. Further away to the left,

a tall tree—rising high above its fellows—marks the spot where Wellington and his staff were stationed during the greater portion of the day.

The artist has seized for illustration the supreme moment of the battle. The time is shortly after six o'clock in the afternoon, when victory still hangs in the balance. The French are preparing for the final onset—the death grapple, as it were, which is to decide the fate of the day. Their troops opposed to the English right have already penetrated nearly to the villages of Pappelot and La Haye; they have partially won Hougemont on the left, and their capture of La Haye Sainte has enabled them to launch a fierce attack

against the English centre. But still though sorely pressed, the allied lines remain unbroken, and the troops hold fast to their positions with that "unconquerable British courage which is never so sedate and stubborn as towards the close of a doubtful and murderous day." Napoleon—having in vain assailed them with the steel-clad French cuirassiers, supported by his infantry, and almost overwhelming artillery—is making his last stake for victory by hurling against them the far-famed Imperial Guard, the élite of the French army, the victors of a hundred hard-won fights. To cover their advance, the artillery, some batteries of which can be seen on the slope to the left of the picture, are pouring a murderous

fire on the British lines, while clouds of tirailleurs which everywhere cover the French front are picking off the English artillerymen.

“The Emperor, who for the greater portion of the day had been seated on a little hillock near La Belle Alliance, has now mounted his charger, and ridden forward with his staff to see the Old Guard set out on their desperate errand. Saluting him with ported arms they move majestically forward, their array as regularly formed as on a field-day, although the English shells are already thickly falling immediately in front of the column, and will soon plough through and through its serried ranks. Marshal Ney, “the bravest of the brave,” is to lead them. As he rides towards the head

of the column, he turns for an instant round, his face full of fierce resolve, as though to assure his master that he will return a victor or not at all.

Already signs of approaching defeat are beginning to appear. In the extreme distance, on the right of the picture, the thick clouds of musketry smoke stretching along the horizon, announce the approach of Blucher and the Prussians. All day their sturdy legions have been toiling along muddy lanes, with clenched teeth and straining limbs, forcing their guns through mire and other obstructions to come to the help of the English, while their fiery old chieftain urged them on with his oft-repeated entreaty, " Lads,

you won't let me break my word to Wellington." It is ominous that the brilliant staff who follow Napoleon—men whose skill and desperate courage have caused the whole of Continental Europe to tremble at their names—all have their faces turned in the direction of these new foes, whose steady advance, unless speedily checked, will cut off the French retreat. In the immediate foreground, a Colonel of the Cavalry of the Guard is returning with the shattered remnant of his corps, who have been all day hurling themselves with devoted, though useless, bravery on the unbreakable English squares. They bring with them a prisoner—a private of the 92nd Highlanders.

But the chief interest of the picture is naturally concentrated in Napoleon—the man whose life had been the history of Europe for the last fifteen years—the central figure which gives the drama of Waterloo its interest. He is almost in the centre of the picture, mounted on his white Persian charger, Marengo, and a little in front of his Marshals. Mr. Woodville has rightly represented him as looking somewhat older and stouter than the Meissonier pictures; but has escaped the error so often incurred by English artists of making him appear corpulent and sluggish, as during the last period of his life at St. Helena. His visage is, as Bourrienne described it, “pale and elongated”—the face while full of iron

determination, is perfectly calm and tells neither of victory or defeat. Though his Empire—his very existence—is at stake, he sits unmoved with impassionless countenance, watching the Old Guard go to victory or to death almost as though he were the presiding deity of the battle.

There is no need to tell in detail the well-known story of how the columns of the Imperial Guard, shattered and decimated on the terrible slope of Mont St. Jean, at length recoiled from the onslaught of the victorious English and Prussians, and were swept away with the rout of the French army; and how the great conqueror, for whom Europe seemed too small, was banished to St. Helena, and died in exile in that lonely little Atlantic islet.

The picture is to be reproduced in etching by M. Jules Jacquet whose skill in handling the needle has enabled him to produce such wonderful results, in his etchings of "1806," and "1807," etc. Most of these now realize a very considerable premium on the published price—the "1807" often fetching as much as \$375 by auction. It may therefore be confidently expected that the proofs of "1815," which possesses a far larger amount of historical interest than any of the preceding pictures in the series, inasmuch as the incident herein depicted closes the career of the greatest military genius the world has ever seen, will speedily be sold out and increase in value like the others.

C. R. G.

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